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## CHAPTER 6

# *Representing Otherness: African, Indian, and European soldiers' letters and memoirs*

*Christian Koller*

Writing about his experiences on the Western Front, the Senegalese war veteran Bakary Diallo recalled an episode involving a captured German soldier:

A German mistook his trench and, together with his coffee, was made prisoner by a Senegalese sentry. When he was encircled by African *tirailleurs*, the whole of his body was trembling. You poor man, didn't you anticipate this moment when you already gloated over your future glory? The blacks you thought to be savages have caught you in the war, but instead of killing you, they have made you a prisoner of war. Your fear will hopefully not prevent you from proclaiming in your country tomorrow, after the battle, sentiments of justice that will rehabilitate their name among the savage human races.<sup>1</sup>

The deployment in Europe of more than 600,000 non-white soldiers from the French and British colonies caused a variety of encounters between European and colonial troops. While the Allied policies concerning the employment of these men in Europe and the hopes and racial prejudices surrounding them have been subject of recent research,<sup>2</sup> their actual experiences in Europe have been explored to a much lesser degree. This chapter uncovers fresh ground in two ways. First, rather than privileging propaganda accounts and official documents, it examines these records alongside personal testimonies – soldiers' letters, diaries and memoirs – to illuminate the colonial experience of combat 'from below'. Second, it is comparative in scope, drawing upon a diverse range of material – German, French and British accounts, as well as letters and memoirs by the colonial troops themselves – in order to understand and examine European perceptions of African and Asian troops alongside the colonial soldiers' view of Europe and its people.

This chapter argues that there are both striking similarities and striking differences among European perceptions of these non-white colonial

troops<sup>3</sup> as well as in the wartime experiences of these men from different parts of the world. While such perceptions were shaped by the prevailing colonial racist ideology that stressed European superiority, often for alleged biological reasons, there was also an element of exoticism about the unfamiliar. The two modes of perception, as in colonial discourses in general, often overlapped, both insisting on a yawning gap between Europeans and non-Europeans.<sup>4</sup> The African and Asian soldiers, on the other hand, experienced varying degrees of cultural shock as many of them negotiated European culture for the first time. Some defended their traditional cultural and religious values, while others openly admired and tried to assimilate Western norms, though there were often overlaps between these attitudes.

#### GERMAN SOLDIERS' VIEW OF COLONIAL TROOPS

German propaganda met the introduction of colonial troops on the Western Front with a deeply racist campaign that represented the non-white colonial soldiers as beasts. They were described in terms that negated their quality as regular military forces: 'a motley crew of colours and religions', 'devils', 'dehumanised wilderness', 'dead vermin of the wilderness', 'Africans jumping around in a devilish ecstasy', 'auxiliary rabble of all colours', 'an exhibition of Africans', 'an anthropological show of uncivilised ... bands and hordes' or the catchphrase 'the black shame' which quickly rose to common usage in the early 1920s, when French colonial troops were stationed in the occupied Rhineland area.<sup>5</sup> In summer 1915, the German Foreign Office put into circulation a memorandum titled *Employment, contrary to International Law, of Colored Troops upon the European Theatre of War by England and France*, in which many atrocities were attributed to colonial soldiers, including the poking out of eyes and the cutting off of ears, noses and heads of wounded and captured German soldiers.<sup>6</sup>

Another objection raised by German propaganda against the employment of colonial non-white troops on European battlefields was its alleged impact on the future of colonialism and the supremacy of the 'white race'. If African and Asian soldiers were trained in the handling of modern arms, if they saw the white nations fighting each other and were allowed to participate in these fights and experience the white soldiers' vulnerability, they would lose their respect for the white race once and forever. After the war, they would turn their weapons against their own masters. German propaganda argued that the French and British policy of deploying colonial

troops in Europe was a flagrant breach of white solidarity and should be condemned by every civilised nation.<sup>7</sup>

German propaganda thus fitted in with discourses of imperial racism and social Darwinism common in late nineteenth-century Europe: it drew upon the contemporary notions of racial hierarchies with Europeans at the top, as well as on fears of global racial struggles, which might result in a victory for the 'inferior' races.<sup>8</sup> Similar discourses had dominated German press and propaganda ten years earlier during the Herero and Nama uprisings in German South West Africa (1904–7), when the rebels were portrayed as 'black beasts' or 'devils' and German military leaders legitimised their brutal suppression of the revolt as an element of 'racial struggle'.<sup>9</sup>

Sometimes, German propaganda published soldiers' letters in order to back its claims against the Allied colonial troops. A letter written by the writer Hans Friedrich Blunck, who had volunteered and would later become an important figure in Nazi cultural policy, was published in the newspaper *Vossische Zeitung* as well as in the war chronicle *Der Völkerkrieg* after the 1915 battle of Ypres. In this letter, apparently written for propaganda purposes, Blunck complained:

In this night, the marvellous fighting had become disgusting to me. The foe deployed Senegalese Negroes and Indian auxiliaries against our glorious volunteers, and it was as if, through the steam of blood that covered the battlefield, the trembling beastly smell of the dark-coloured peoples emerged. As if, together with the inferior blood of these strangers, something would pour into the soil plaguing the country, as if the earth knew that it would never again be able to become green after the Africans' feet had touched it . . . I passed the trenches. Some soldiers were handling their colonel's corpse . . . if you looked him in the eyes: shock. Something undescribably horrible must have emerged before he died. He, who had dreamt so much of equal adversaries' fight, . . . the brooder, the German, had seen the black flood, the dark mud, devouring him and his men. He had not been able to fight man against man, as had been the dream of his life; the enemy had sent half-animal peoples of Africa, whom he was expected to take on; the enemy had mobilised Asia and betrayed thousand years old Europe. I suddenly knew where these horrible ideas came from. It was, as if the colonel's shaken soul was with us with all its shock about this dark treason of Europe.<sup>10</sup>

Other personal documents, published during the war, mentioned colonial troops as well, but not in such sharply racist terms.<sup>11</sup>

But how were these colonial troops portrayed in German soldiers' letters and diaries not written for propaganda purposes? Did first-person narratives tell stories different from other kinds of documents? Some personal documents mentioned colonial soldiers without much comment. Private Karl

Falkenhain from Naundorf wrote to his wife in September 1914, about his deployment at a prisoner camp in Kleinwittenberg, in which there were 'Russians, Blacks and French, all mixed'. He mentioned a lot of curious civilian visitors but he did not say whether they especially came to see the Africans.<sup>12</sup> Richard Dehmel noted in his diary on 15 October 1914 a similar curiosity:

The sergeant told me yesterday that England's Indian auxiliaries had arrived at the front; one can see them, together with their wives and camels, digging trenches some kilometres from here. As there are also Zouaves [French settlers from North Africa, wearing colourful oriental uniforms] on the opposite side of the front, the big decisive battle will produce a colourful picture of peoples.<sup>13</sup>

Other German soldiers openly looked down on the non-white soldiers, whether they came from Asia, or from North or West Africa. Volunteer Kurt Schlenner, an undergraduate from Berlin who would be killed shortly afterwards, stated in a letter to his parents in December 1914 that the German soldiers were united by a general spirit of comradeship, while the enemy troops were weakened by their racial diversity: 'everybody will first look whether an emerging comrade is from the same tribe as himself. One cannot respect a Negro as a comrade after all.'<sup>14</sup> In his diary Colonel General Carl von Einem referred to the colonial troops as 'riffraff' and a 'menagerie'.<sup>15</sup> Private V. Herzog, a gymnast from Hamburg, described 'Hindus' and 'Zuaves' as 'gory'. Recounting the story of a captured French city, allegedly devastated by fleeing Allied soldiers, he reasoned that 'these must have been Singhalese, so no wonder' (mixing up Senegalese with Singhalese) and further noted that lots of 'Turkos' and 'Hindus' had deserted.<sup>16</sup> Another private wrote in September 1914 that the North African soldiers looked 'forbidding' and that he did not feel sorry for the fallen colonial troops.<sup>17</sup>

Similar notions can be found in the post-war memoirs of the German soldiers. Both leaders of the third supreme command of the German army referred to the colonial troops for propaganda purposes. While Erich Ludendorff, in his memoirs written in the winter of 1918–19, only mentioned that France had made extensive use of African troops, especially in the summer of 1918,<sup>18</sup> Paul von Hindenburg stuck closer to wartime phraseology:

Where tanks were lacking, the enemy drove black waves towards us, waves composed of African bodies. Woe to us, when these invaded our lines and murdered or, even worse, tortured the defenceless. Human indignation and accusation must not be directed against the blacks who committed these atrocities,

but against those who deployed these hordes on European soil, allegedly fighting for honour, liberty and justice.<sup>19</sup>

In contrast, the soldiers who, unlike the two generals, had themselves fought against these men used much less of this wartime propaganda-fuelled vocabulary in their memoirs. Instead of pre-conceived notions, trench digger Martin Beradt displayed curiosity and an exoticist attitude towards the colonial soldiers.<sup>20</sup> Ernst Jünger, in his famous *Stahlgewittern*, even dedicated a full chapter to fighting against Indian troops in May 1917.<sup>21</sup> Jünger characterised the Indian sepoys as 'gracile figures', 'having come a long way over the ocean just to have their skulls smashed by Hanoverian fusiliers on this god-damned piece of soil'.<sup>22</sup> Quite similar was the mention of colonial troops in the memoirs of infantryman Otto Maximilian Hitzfeld, written in the early 1980s.<sup>23</sup> Thus, personal encounters with colonial troops seemed to have added to racist perceptions a sense of exoticism.

A very interesting source in this respect is the Alsatian peasant Dominik Richert's memoirs, written probably in the winter of 1918–19, but published posthumously only in 1989. Richert, who had deserted in the summer of 1918, did not share any nationalist or militarist notions but harboured racial prejudices. He considered the Allied European soldiers to be victims of militarism like himself and did not believe in the German atrocity propaganda against alleged French and Belgian *franc-tireurs*.<sup>24</sup> Russian soldiers, however, appeared to him as 'half-cultivated',<sup>25</sup> so that he did not dare to desert at the Eastern Front.<sup>26</sup> Indian troops were even stranger to Richert, who referred to them as 'brown chaps' or 'blacks'. While he condemned killing on nearly every page of his memoir and provided detailed descriptions of wounding and mutilation, he only briefly noted how he made an Indian 'unfit for action' in close combat.<sup>27</sup>

On the whole, front-line soldiers seem to have shared the widespread racist perceptions about the colonial non-white troops; they hardly differentiated among different ethnic groups, and sometimes even confused them. Wartime diaries and letters were not very different from the post-war memoirs in this respect. However, these personal testimonies did not always rehearse the rhetoric of the German propaganda machine. In contrast to rewritings authors close to the state apparatus such as Hans Friedrich Blunck, Erich Ludendorff and Heinrich von Hindenburg, ordinary soldiers' letters, diaries and memoirs hardly mention issues such as the colonial soldiers' alleged atrocities or their war service as a threat to the colonial order. The casual racism of these accounts was also informed by a

certain curiosity and exoticism, which distinguish them from the programmatic and vicious racism of German official propaganda.

#### ALLIED SOLDIERS' VIEW OF COLONIAL TROOPS

The image of the colonial troops in the French and British press and propaganda accounts was of course much more positive than in German publications. But at the same time, it was not entirely free of racist imagery. Despite the opposing lines of argument, certain basic racist and imperialist notions were common to French, British and German propaganda.

In the first few months of the war, representations of African troops in the French press did not always differ substantially from German propaganda images. Two weeks after the outbreak of the war, the *Dépêche Coloniale* portrayed African soldiers as 'démons noirs' who would carry over the Rhine, with their bayonets, the revenge of civilisation against 'modern barbarism'.<sup>28</sup> In February 1915, the Marseilles-based journal *Midi Colonial* published a cartoon showing a Muslim soldier wearing a necklace made of German soldiers' ears. The subtitle ran: 'Be silent, be careful, enemy ears are listening!'<sup>29</sup>

It was only at the beginning of 1915 that French officials started promoting a revised image of the Africans as infantile and devoted savages in order to counter German atrocity propaganda. The colonial soldiers were depicted as belonging to *racés jeunes* and as absolutely obedient to their white masters because of the whites' intellectual superiority.<sup>30</sup> Alphonse Séché, for instance, stated the following in the weekly *L'Opinion*:

For the black man, the white man's orders, the chief's orders are summarised in one phrase that he repeats again and again 'y a service' . . . He won't discuss; he does not try to understand. He would kill his father, mother, wife, child to obey the order he has received. He is not responsible; a superior will send his own . . . In all the blacks' acts, we find this mixture of childlike nature and heroism . . . The Senegalese is brave by nature; as a primitive being, he does not analyse . . . For the Senegalese, his officer is everything; he replaces the absent chief of his village, his father. If the Senegalese has confidence in his chief, he does nothing without consulting him.<sup>31</sup>

Here, the African soldier is at once 'childlike' and 'heroic', intellectually inferior but wholly loyal: the notion of brutality has changed. Whilst the image spread by the French media in the opening months of the war stressed the Africans' 'brutality', implying a possible threat for the French as well, the revised image of the infantile savages insisted on the colonial masters' complete control. African soldiers would be fighters only when told

to be so and therefore could only be a threat to the Germans, but never to the French. On the other hand, the British media made a clear differentiation in their representations of their own and of the French army's colonial troops. While France's African troops were depicted as stupid and childlike – 'In his black innocence he seems to be struggling with the things he cannot understand'<sup>32</sup> is how a report in *The Times* (January 1915) described a West African soldier – Indian troops were often characterised as 'picturesque'.<sup>33</sup> The British media emphasised not only the loyalty, martial spirit and bravery of the Indian troops, but also their physical grandeur and cultural practices.<sup>34</sup>

How did European Allied soldiers themselves perceive the colonial non-white troops? While most of the Indian troops were withdrawn from the European theatre of war in December 1915, the French enacted a new policy of 'amalgamation' after their African troops suffered dramatic losses in the autumn of 1914.<sup>35</sup> African troops, whose numbers increased massively in the second part of the war, would now no longer fight as independent units, but were combined with European troops according to the historical model of amalgamation of old troops and volunteer corps during the French Revolution. Yet, was it true, as the German volunteer Kurt Schlenner suggested (see above), that European soldiers did not respect the colonial troops as comrades?

The letters and memoirs of French and British soldiers show an ambivalent attitude towards their non-white allies. Most soldiers were curious about these 'exotic' soldiers and some even sympathised with them. Louis Barthas, a cooper, trade unionist and socialist, described an Algerian division he encountered at Narbonne as 'magnifique' and even contrasted them favourably to his own unit.<sup>36</sup> Second Lieutenant Roland Leighton, in a letter to his fiancée Vera Brittain in July 1915, mentioned North African troops: 'A company of Turcos has just gone along the road, singing a weird chant punctuated with hand clapping. They all look very Negroid, but are wellbuilt men and march well.'<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, evidence also suggests that these colonial soldiers were not considered by British soldiers to be comrades on equal terms, but rather were seen as auxiliaries for especially dangerous tasks (which corresponded with the French army's doctrine).<sup>38</sup>

Indian troops attracted see attention of European Allied soldiers. According to Barthas, the news that a 'Hindu army' would soon be arriving at Marseilles caused 'general curiosity' in the autumn of 1914. Barthas described Indian soldiers' habits and customs and especially their way of slaughtering goats.<sup>39</sup> The English officer poet Siegfried Sassoon wrote in his diary: 'I watched the Indian cavalry in the horse-lines by the river: their red



head-caps made occasional spots of poppy-colour: the rest was browns and duns and greys – like the huddle of horses and wagons and blankets, and the worn grassless earth.<sup>40</sup> Louis Barthas's description of a French military hospital may have been typical of the experience of many Allied soldiers: 'All parts of the world, all races and all colours were represented. Moroccans, Annamites, white and black Americans, Italians, etc., and five or six Frenchmen. When conversation started, a nice cacophony was to be heard.'<sup>41</sup>

Only a few soldier-writers explicitly expressed their sympathy towards the colonial soldiers. French infantryman Jacques Vaché, for instance, referred to the Indian soldiers in a 1917 letter as '*poilus de la cavalerie indienne*', thus using a term common for French soldiers and thereby stressing that he considered Indian sepoys as real comrades.<sup>42</sup> Louis Barthas felt sorry for the North African soldiers who were sent to the front immediately after their arrival in Europe: 'Hardly anyone of these miserable wretches would ever return to Algeria!'<sup>43</sup> At the same time, ideas about their alleged brutality lingered on, particularly in the literary imagination. Thus, in his war novel *Le Feu* (1916), the novelist Henri Barbusse, who had spent eleven months at the front, refers to the Moroccan soldiers as 'devils' who are used to 'poking the bayonet in the enemy's belly'.<sup>44</sup> Stories about the killing of prisoners and the cutting off of enemies' heads by Africans seemed to circulate in the French army. Thus, among the Allied soldiers, there was a wide range of responses, from sympathy and admiration to fear and anxiety. In spite of the significant differences between the French and British attitudes towards their respective colonial troops, certain common perceptions and prejudices were discernible, moving between racism and exoticism. Many of these find their most vicious and exaggerated form in German discourses. Such prejudices could also be found among the neutral voices from the front. Alden Davison, serving with the American Red Cross Ambulance service, in a 1916 letter to his mother described Senegalese soldiers as 'demons at hand-to-hand fighting, but whether the sight of blood maddens them, or the old racial instinctive hatred between black and white crops out, they kill anyone who gets in the way, be he French or German'.<sup>45</sup>

#### COLONIAL NON-WHITE SOLDIERS' VIEW OF EUROPE

How did the colonial soldiers perceive Europe and the Europeans? The responses of the Indian soldiers have received some attention in recent years, based on censored war letters.<sup>46</sup> These letters show a variety of responses

and coping mechanisms: some soldiers were able to assimilate European mores and habits with their cultural background; a few even thought of marrying European women, though following Indian customs.<sup>47</sup> Some rejected their own customs and habits and formed an unconditional admiration for the European social, economic and gender order,<sup>48</sup> while another group tried to defend their cultural identity and fulfil their religious duties and traditional roles as men and warriors. It was often men from this last group who expressed despair and resignation.<sup>49</sup> There were, however, overlaps between these categories and gradual processes of cultural adaptation.<sup>50</sup>

As for the North and West African soldiers, many of the 'personal' documents published during and after the war were intended to serve propaganda purposes. During the war, Germany arranged the publication in German and French of several texts by the Algerian officer Rabah Abdallah Boukabouya, who had deserted in 1915.<sup>51</sup> The French press, on the other hand, sporadically published African soldiers' letters, demonstrating their loyalty to *civilisation française*.<sup>52</sup> After the war, with Germany staging a massive propaganda campaign against the stationing of African troops in the French occupational zone in the Rhineland, a lot of African soldiers' autobiographical writings were published in France in order to demonstrate these soldiers' loyalty and progress towards civilisation and the alleged success of the French colonial doctrine of assimilation. Thus, colonial periodicals such as the *Dépêche Coloniale et Maritime*, the *Annales Coloniales* and the *Revue des Troupes Coloniales* as well as writers such as René Trautmann published several letters from African soldiers.<sup>53</sup>

At the same time, the first books about the war in French and by African authors appeared. Written by former colonial soldiers, they were, at least implicitly, concerned with the colonial relationship and they tended to stress the superiority of European and especially French civilisation. In 1920, the first novel of an Algerian author appeared in French titled *Ahmed Ben Mostapha: Goumier*.<sup>54</sup> Its author Mohammed Ben Chérif had served as a cavalry officer and become a German prisoner of war in October 1914. The novel was strongly autobiographical. The hero of this first-person narrative is an Algerian officer recruited in 1899 for the French campaign in Morocco, fighting subsequently in the First World War and eventually dying in a German prisoners' camp. In this novel, Ben Chérif stressed the need for modernisation of the Muslim community which he portrays as stagnating through the adoration of its glorious past. His hero seems to have studied French history and literature, but is equally well-versed in his own cultural heritage. He admires French culture, but at the same time is proud of being of nomadic descent. As Seth Graebner argues, Ben Chérif's novel

tried to show the Muslims' valour and loyalty towards France in order to back post-war claims for political reform in the North African colonies; it also had the purpose of replying to Boukabouya's propaganda texts.<sup>55</sup>

In 1926, the former Senegalese infantryman Bakary Diallo became the first native African to publish a book in French on his war experience. Entitled *Force-Bonté*, for many French colonialists, these memoirs proved the superiority of France's policy of assimilation over other countries' colonial policies.<sup>56</sup> Diallo's confrontation with European culture had started not in 1914 but already in 1911, when he had volunteered for the Tirailleurs sénégalais. On the very day he joined up, he was impressed by the recruitment officer's ability to write: 'The rapidity with which his writing multiplied made me wish to imitate him. This, of course, was not possible immediately; but 'I'll learn later' became my overall resolution.'<sup>57</sup> A few days later, Diallo was punished for scribbling on a freshly painted barrack wall whilst on duty as a sentry.

*Force-Bonté* unconditionally portrays the French as the Africans' benefactors and models.<sup>58</sup> Diallo even mentions proudly that, when his unit arrived in France in the autumn of 1914, they were greeted by French civilians shouting not only 'Bravo les tirailleurs sénégalais! Vive la France!', but also 'Couper têtes aux allemands.' He interpreted this as a proof of their confidence in the colonial troops rather than reflecting on its imperial connotations.<sup>59</sup> Diallo initially describes himself and his comrades as being on the same level as French children, which is how the Senegalese troops were portrayed by French wartime propaganda. He then narrates his progress towards the higher stages of French civilisation through military service, until he and his friends are completely assimilated into French society and even started dreaming in French. When told that war has broken out and that they are being shipped to France, a '*gaîté enfantine*' (infantile joy), in Diallo's words, seizes them.<sup>60</sup>

In France, his communication was initially much easier with children than with adults.<sup>61</sup> However, Diallo did not consider the infantilisation of the Senegalese as a disadvantage, but rather as an opportunity to be integrated into European cultural life under French guidance. When Diallo made friends with a seven-year-old French girl, his comment was: 'Lucky me. I have a French sister.'<sup>62</sup> Through his little 'sister's' family, Diallo became acquainted with a 'force that would completely dominate my mind' – the 'light of goodness'.<sup>63</sup> The gifts he got at his departure to the front appeared to him as 'dons de ma mère'.<sup>64</sup> While it is not clear whether this story is true – for French officials did everything they could to segregate West African soldiers from civilians in the first half of the war<sup>65</sup> – it is

nevertheless the leitmotiv of Diallo's war memoirs: Good mother France takes care of her African children, leading them step by step to a higher stage of civilisation. Diallo explicitly compares his birth family's 'fraternité' to the kindness he experienced in France, which he considered to be superior:

Today, we are heading to the front. I don't want to depart without having said goodbye to the Baudry family . . . In the few days I spent in Sète, my soul, rocked by pure tender goodness, has encountered loads of affection hitherto unknown to me. My Senegalese sisters, whom I love so much, haven't excited my sentiments so strongly. Nevertheless, they love me with all the goodness, all the tenderness I ever wished to receive from them. Maybe brotherhood encountered by God's grace is more intensive than innate brotherhood?<sup>66</sup>

At the end of his memoir, Diallo observes a French woman feeding birds in the Parc Monceau in Paris and he comments:

What a beautiful scene! For I think, the birds, it's ourselves, the Black, whilst this lady is France! Grateful birds, you can show your joy to everybody coming here in order to enjoy some fresh air . . . In front of your benefactor, this lady with a friendly face and golden blond hair, who cared to bring you some bread, I beg you to shout together with me: *Vive la force-bonté de la France!*<sup>67</sup>

According to Diallo, through the good offices of France and her army, all differences between the French and the Africans as well as between the different African ethnic groups would eventually disappear.<sup>68</sup>

Diallo's war experience, however, differed from that of many of his comrades in several respects. As he had volunteered for the French army as early as in 1911, he did not experience the forced conscription between 1914 and 1917 that traumatised West African populations.<sup>69</sup> Diallo's front-line experience was not representative either. He was only at the front for a relatively short time, in September and October 1914. On 3 November 1914, he was wounded. He was subsequently promoted and awarded an honour for bravery and even got French citizenship in 1920. After the war, he remained in France until 1928. By contrast, the average West African soldier would have been forcibly recruited between 1914 and 1917 and would have spent much longer periods at the front. After the end of the war, he would have been shipped back home immediately, without ever getting French citizenship, remaining a 'sujet' without political rights. Joe Lunn's oral history study illuminates the war experience of a larger, more representative, group of West Africans.<sup>70</sup> Most young West African men were not interested in joining the French army: many tried to hide in the bush or to flee to neighbouring British and Portuguese colonies, and in some cases there was

even armed resistance against the French recruitment officers. Once forcibly conscripted and arrived in Europe, West African soldiers often did not become unconditional admirers of the *civilisation française*; rather, they adhered to their religion and tried to overcome the fear of being killed with the help of traditional rites and songs.

In conclusion, if we compare the European soldiers' perceptions of colonial non-white troops with these men's views of Europe and Europeans, it becomes apparent that the writings of each side were often influenced by and reflected the contemporary colonial ideology. European soldiers' representations of colonial troops moved between racism and exoticism, notwithstanding the differences and variations in the texts written by German, French or British soldiers. They reflected the imperialist imagination and at times the pattern of wartime propaganda about the deployment of non-white troops in Europe. Very few metropolitan Allied soldiers would unconditionally accept colonial troops as comrades. On the other hand, the writings of the colonial non-white troops also showed a variety of ways of describing otherness. One variant could be characterised as 'traditionalist', stressing their own cultural and religious background in the face of European modernity. Another – 'assimilationism' – included admiration for European civilisation and a readiness to imbibe and emulate European norms. However, as with racism and exoticism in the European soldiers' writing, there were also many overlaps between traditionalism and assimilationism. A comparison of the two kinds of writing also shows the effects of the asymmetry in the colonial relationship. Taking European superiority for granted, the Europeans felt no immediate need of explicit reflections about themselves and their own cultural and social backgrounds. The colonial non-white soldiers, on the other hand, were always acutely conscious of the Other, constantly reflecting not only about Europe and the Europeans, but at the same time about themselves through comparison and contrast.

#### NOTES

- 1 B. Diallo, *Force-Bonté* (Paris: Rieder, 1926), 123. All translations from German and French sources in this chapter are mine unless otherwise stated.
- 2 See C. Koller, 'Von Wilden aller Rassen niedergemetzelt'. *Die Diskussion um die Verwendung von Kolonialtruppen in Europa zwischen Rassismus, Kolonial- und Militärpolitik (1914–1930)* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2001); Koller, 'Enemy Images: Race and Gender Stereotypes in the Discussion on Colonial Troops – A Franco-German Comparison, 1914–1923', in K. Hagemann and S. Schüler-Springorum (eds.), *Home/Front: The Military, War and Gender in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2002), 139–57; E. Kettlitz,

*Afrikanische Soldaten aus deutscher Sicht seit 1871. Stereotype, Vorurteile, Feindbilder und Rassismus* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2007); R. S. Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914–1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

- 3 In this chapter, the phrase 'colonial troops' is also used to refer to the colonial non-white troops of the British and French empires.
- 4 See Koller, *Rassismus* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2009), 59–64.
- 5 E. Rosen, *England. Ein Britenspiegel. Schlaglichter aus der Kriegs-, Kultur- und Sittengeschichte* (Stuttgart, 1916), 96 and 98; V. Valois, *Nieder mit England! Betrachtungen und Erwägungen* (Berlin, 1915), 7; R. Borchardt, *Gesammelte Werke in Einzelbänden. Prosa V* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1979), (217–64) 243; L. Dill, 'Die Gefangenenlager bei Merseburg', *Gartenlaube*, 63 (1915), 9; *Ein Dutzend englischer Sünden wider das Völkerrecht. Tatsachen und Feststellungen*, no place, 1916, 5; *Kriegschronik. Kriegstagebuch, Soldatenbriefe, Kriegsbilder* (Berlin: Berg, 1915–17), 48; A. Hoffmann, *Illustrierte Geschichte des Weltkrieges*, vol. V (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1916), 307; C. H. Baer (ed.), *Der Völkerkrieg. Eine Chronik der Ereignisse seit dem 1. Juli 1914*, 18 vols. (Stuttgart: Hoffmann, 1914–18), vol. x, 107.
- 6 *Employment, Contrary to International Law, of Colored Troops upon the European Theatre of War by England and France* (Berlin: Auswärtiges Amt, 1915).
- 7 See E. Müller-Meinigen, *Der Weltkrieg und das Völkerrecht. Eine Anklage gegen die Kriegführung des Dreiverbandes* (Berlin: Reimer, 1915), 68–9.
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